

July 13, 2015
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

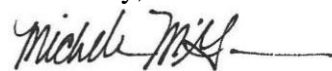
Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
 Fisheries Division
 Endangered Species Coordinator
 Native Species Coordinator - Fisheries
 Region 2 - Missoula
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, Deer Lodge, MT
Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Helena, MT
Montana River Action, Bozeman MT
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Ovando MT
George Liknes, U.S. Forest Service, Lincoln MT

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project that would upgrade an irrigation diversion on Stonewall Creek by adding a fish screen and an instream cross-vane to allow fish passage and bedload movement while reducing entrainment. The intent of the project is to reduce channel impairments, restore a migration corridor, and eliminate fish losses to the irrigation ditch. Stonewall Creek is a tributary to Keep Cool Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage near the town of Lincoln (Lewis & Clark County).

Please submit any comments by 5:00 P.M., August 12, 2015 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,



Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Fisheries Division Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Stonewall Creek Fish Screen

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in streams and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project that would upgrade an irrigation diversion on Stonewall Creek by adding a fish screen and an instream cross-vane to allow fish passage and bedload movement while reducing entrainment. The intent of the project is to reduce channel impairments, restore a migration corridor, and eliminate fish losses to the irrigation ditch.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Stonewall Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage, within Township 15 North, Range 9 West, Section 34 in Lewis & Clark County (Figure 1). It is located near the town of Lincoln.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and to ensure angling opportunities whenever possible." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project addresses entrainment, passage, and survival of westslope cutthroat trout, a native species of concern.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project involves replacing the existing rock check dam used to divert water with a rock cross-vane set at an elevation to allow fish passage and bedload movement (Figure 2). A fish screen with a bypass will also be installed within the ditch. A flat-plate fish screen with a paddlewheel is the proposed design.

The project will influence approximately 250 feet of channel but will screen the uppermost diversion on Stonewall Creek just below a reference reach where westslope cutthroat trout

numbers are strong.

The total estimated cost for this project is \$38,900. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$13,300. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited	\$1,600	\$9,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		\$10,000
Montana Trout Unlimited		\$5,000
TOTAL = \$25,600		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Stonewall Creek Fish Screen

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project that would upgrade an irrigation diversion on Stonewall Creek by adding a fish screen and an instream cross-vane to allow fish passage and bedload movement while reducing entrainment.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in stream flow would occur in Stonewall Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization).

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

This project would affect vegetation during construction, when equipment and materials are mobilized and stored on site to complete the project. The affected area would be revegetated with native seed and vegetation appropriate for the site. Short-term impacts are considered minor and long-term impacts are considered positive.

7. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

Construction activities that could affect terrestrial and aquatic life habitats will be short-term. Impacts would be aquatic and confined to the project area, resulting from the construction of rock cross-vanes and installation of the fish screen. Work would be completed at an appropriate time to avoid impacts to spawning or emerging westslope cutthroat trout. Long term, this project should increase aquatic habitats through increased connectivity, survival, and overall stream health.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project may affect westslope cutthroat trout; a species that is federally recognized and designated a “Species of Concern” in Montana. The impacts on this species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive, potentially increasing recruitment and survival. Increased fish passage and reduced entrainment are key components of this project.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The installation of a fish screen should prevent the loss of salmonids down the ditch and improve upstream fish passage within Stonewall Creek. Reduced fish losses and improved passage is expected to improve both population abundance and movement of all species utilizing the project area. This impact is considered positive.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of this project and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the fish would continue to be entrained in the ditch. Fish would not have complete upstream passage around the diversion.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to install a fish screen on an irrigation ditch connected to Stonewall Creek, which could prevent entrainment of salmonids, improve fish passage, and allow better control of diverted water, potentially increasing survival and recruitment of fish in Stonewall Creek.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 12, 2015.

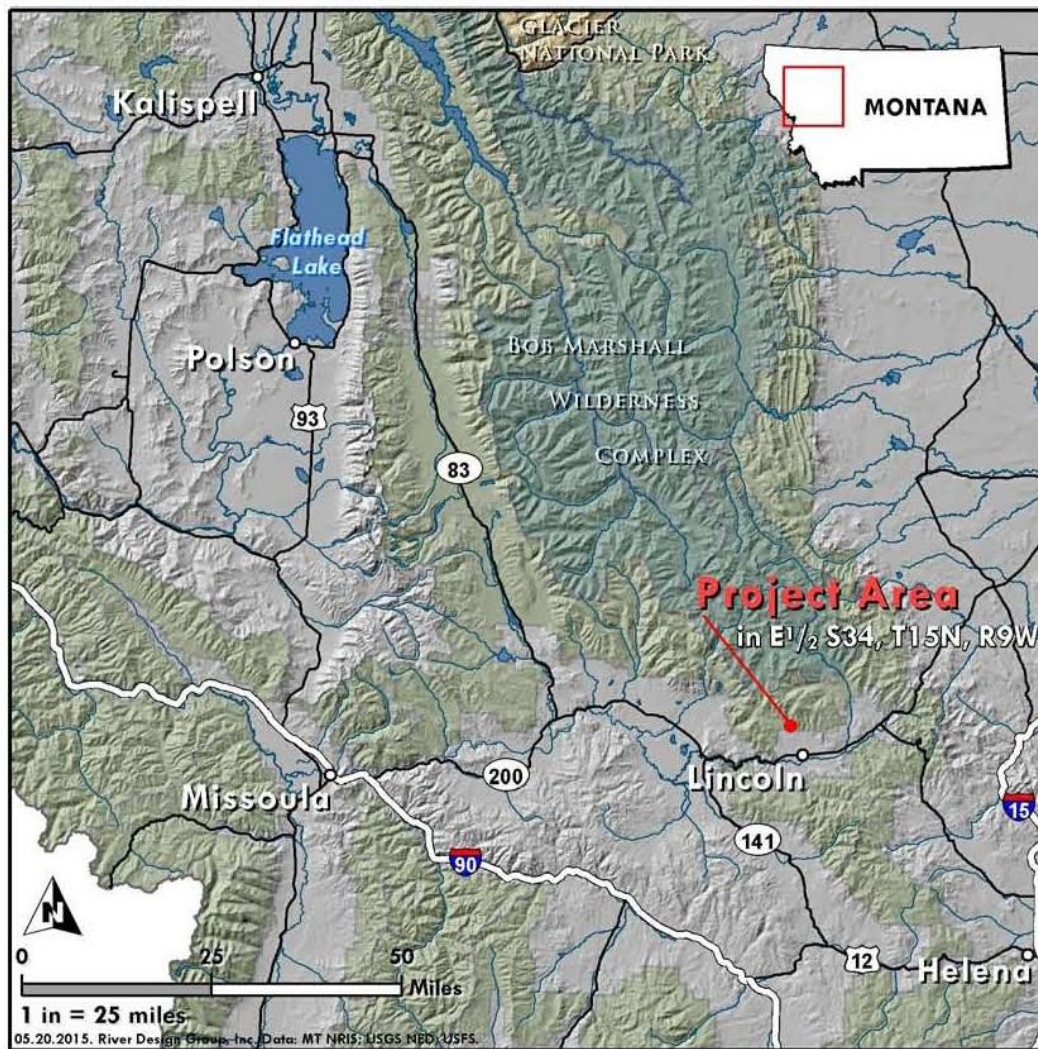
6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

Contributors: Ryen Neudecker, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited; River Design Group, Inc.

FIGURE 1

PROJECT VICINITY MAP



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